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Vicky Rezaie
Waltham Holy Cross Junior School
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Waltham Abbey
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Dear Mrs Rezaie

Special measures monitoring inspection of Waltham Holy Cross Junior School

Following my visit with Lynn Lowery, Additional Inspector, to your school on 17–18 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions, which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Essex.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Winter
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2014

- Improve teaching so that it is at least good by ensuring that all teachers:
 - learn from the good and outstanding teaching which exists in the school and take steps to improve their own practice
 - develop their questioning skills to probe pupils' understanding more effectively and deepen pupils' knowledge and thinking
 - develop the quality of their exposition in mathematics and English lessons, and model more effectively the skills that they are teaching
 - develop the marking system so that it is consistently used in all classes
 - adopt a programme for the consistent teaching of spelling across the school.

- Accelerate the rates of pupils' progress in all classes so that standards rise to the levels of which pupils are capable by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can and should achieve
 - giving pupils of different abilities tasks which challenge them, and allowing them enough time to practise what they have been taught
 - giving pupils opportunities to use their mathematical skills in real-life situations
 - developing pupils' ability to write at length and to improve their understanding of grammar, punctuation and spelling.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders at all levels accurately identify the most important actions that are needed to bring about improvements in teaching, and that they make sure the improvements are happening
 - the headteacher tackles poor leadership swiftly and holds leaders to account for pupils' progress
 - subject leaders develop the skills to support teachers to improve and are given the time to do so
 - weak teaching is challenged and that teachers know exactly what needs to improve, within short timescales
 - the newly re-constituted governing body receives appropriate training and help from the local authority to implement the recommendations from the recent external review of governance, so that it challenges and supports the work of the school effectively.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 17–18 September 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed all twelve classes. Seven of the observations were conducted jointly with the executive headteacher and one with another senior leader. The inspectors met with the executive headteacher and other senior leaders, including one of the acting deputy headteachers, the acting assistant headteacher and the leader for special educational needs. Meetings were also held with governors and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors spoke to pupils in lessons and in two meetings, they talked informally to some parents. Inspectors scrutinised documents, monitoring records, achievement data and school improvement plans.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, eight members of staff have left the school, including seven teachers, one senior leader and a sports coach. The assistant headteacher from the linked infant school has been seconded to the school as an acting deputy headteacher. One newly qualified teacher has been appointed on a temporary contract. Two overseas-trained teachers have been appointed on fixed-term contracts. A further teacher is working at the school on a short-term contract. The leader of special educational needs and the pastoral manager both now have part-time teaching commitments. A physical education cover supervisor, a part-time special educational needs cover supervisor and two teaching assistants began working in the school on 1 September 2014.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement for the oldest pupils improved in the summer 2014 assessments. The proportion of Year 6 pupils attaining the expected Level 4 in reading, writing and mathematics is now average or much closer to the national average. Attainment at the higher Levels 5 and 6 also improved. Many more pupils made the progress they should in their writing from Year 3 to Year 6. Although the proportion of pupils making expected or better than expected progress in reading and mathematics improved, it is still too low.

Progress in other year groups varies too much. Pupils make good progress in Year 6, for instance, but progress in Year 5 is still too slow. Pupils in Year 5 have large gaps in their skills and knowledge. The quality of teaching in this year group is now securing the accelerated progress pupils need to catch up, but more needs to be done to ensure that these pupils catch up quickly.

Pupils across the school have more regular opportunities to write in daily literacy lessons but sometimes they are not given enough time to write for a sustained period. Learning time is lost in many lessons when pupils are required to copy lesson

aims into their books. Spelling, grammar and punctuation, along with the presentation of pupils' work, remain common weaknesses in writing.

Pupils now have greater opportunities to investigate number and to solve problems in mathematics. Teachers make efforts to relate number work to real-life situations, which helps pupils understand the purpose of their learning. However, some pupils have significant gaps in their knowledge of number facts and in how to perform basic calculations. These gaps hinder their better progress.

There is a growing culture of reading in the school, and older pupils can name their favourite authors. Pupils appreciate the opportunity to take reading books home. Some reading lessons, however, are not purposeful and do not build on pupils' reading skills or extend their comprehension.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching varies. The high turnover of staff at the end of the summer term and the recruitment of largely inexperienced teachers has had an impact on the overall profile of teaching. Experienced teachers and school leaders are supporting new members of staff to help them plan purposeful lessons, but this work is at an early stage. Where teachers have benefited from the school's coaching programmes over the last two terms, teaching has mainly improved, although some inadequacy remains.

Whole-school expectations for teaching are evident in lessons. However, the implementation of some of these expectations varies too much. For example, the school expects that teachers will provide a set of expectations in lessons as a way of ensuring that pupils are sufficiently challenged. Teachers specify which criteria should be reached by 'all' pupils, which by 'most', and which should be reached by just 'some' pupils. Although teachers are following this approach, there remain too many lessons where they do not sufficiently stretch pupils. Sometimes this is because the success criteria are not entirely relevant or helpful. In lessons where the success criteria are used well, pupils take control of their own learning. They challenge themselves and each other.

There are many strengths in teaching, and enough that is providing good role models to help improve teaching overall. Where skilled teachers build systematically on pupils' existing skills and lessons link together in a coherent way, pupils can see the purpose for their learning and they engage meaningfully in lessons.

There are some common weaknesses in the quality of teaching. When activities are not matched well enough to pupils' capabilities, it is because teachers' expectations are sometimes not high enough and at other times too high. The pace of learning slows in lessons when pupils do not have sufficient time to consolidate their learning by practising the skills they have been taught, or when teachers do not check pupils'

understanding in lessons early enough to identify any misconception in order to address them. The teaching of reading is not effective in those classes where teachers are not clear enough about the purpose of guided reading lessons.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are polite, friendly and confident to talk about their work. Their behaviour around the school is generally good. Sometimes pupils lack focus and good learning behaviours are not fully embedded in all lessons. However, disruption to lessons is uncommon.

Pupils say that they feel safe but they have mixed views about behaviour in the school. Some can see that it has improved but others feel that disruptive behaviour and name-calling remain common. Pupils understand what the main forms of bullying are, but they have limited understanding of what constitutes homophobic bullying. Many are confident that staff try to address bullying but some say that adults do not always get to the bottom of incidents well enough.

Records of behaviour incidents indicate that bullying and racism are rare but that there are occasions when pupils hurt each other. The school does not analyse behaviour records well enough. It is planning to move to a more secure system for tracking behaviour incidents so that trends can be spotted and addressed.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The executive headteacher leads the school calmly. She is determined to improve outcomes for pupils. She has the confidence of staff and pupils. She is focused firmly on improving the quality of teaching. The executive headteacher is supported by a leadership team that is growing in confidence and impact. The acting deputy headteachers and assistant headteacher are increasingly involved in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. They support colleagues in their planning and delivery of lessons. Leaders of mathematics and English know what needs to improve and have credible plans to make a difference.

The leadership of provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is new. The leader is about to begin accredited training. There are plans to link closely with the special educational needs leader in the infant school to add leadership capacity. Currently, the provision for and progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are not tracked well enough. The impact of the school's work to support these pupils is not evaluated sufficiently.

Leaders monitor teaching and learning regularly and provide useful feedback for teachers. The executive headteacher evaluates the quality of teaching accurately and is clear about what needs to improve. She has introduced weekly training

sessions for new staff to ensure that they are given guidance to implement school policies and expectations.

The school has put measures in place to work more closely with the linked infant school including:

- the secondment of the infant school assistant headteacher to an acting deputy headteacher role in the junior school to aid pupils' transition and to help to train new teachers
- the appointment of the Chair of the Governing Body of the infant school to the post of Chair of the Governing Body of the junior school to enable consistent governance across both schools
- the leaders of both schools working more closely together; for instance, to set performance management targets
- the headteacher of the infant school becoming the executive headteacher of the junior school in January 2015 and both schools consulting about the proposal to amalgamate in September 2015.

Governors have high expectations and have begun to monitor the school more closely through the single plan. They now expect to see first-hand evidence to support leaders' assertions that things are improving. Governors understand the need to continue to monitor more rigorously, and much of this work is done through the strategic intervention board. The recruitment of the infant Chair of the Governing Body to lead the governors is a strategic decision to ensure that governance continues to improve.

The required pre-employment checks are conducted to ensure that adults are safe to work in school, and these are appropriately recorded. Leaders do not do enough, however, to explore gaps in service and gaps in references from previous employers overseas.

External support

The support of the local authority is delivered through the partnership with Lilac Sky, who, until the end of the autumn term, provide school leadership and support to improve teaching. The level of this support has reduced this term despite the need for teaching to improve quickly. There is added capacity from within the school, however, through the impact of the senior leadership team, which has grown in numbers and effectiveness. The school has made arrangements with a consultant to provide training for newly qualified and overseas-trained teachers.